

Rock Creek Water Tower

HABS No. WYO-55a

At junction of Rock Creek and Union Pacific  
Railroad crossing, about 11 miles southeast  
of Rock River

Rock River Vicinity

Albany County

Wyoming

HABS  
WYO,  
1-ROCRIV,  
1A-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D. C. 20240

## ROCK CREEK WATER TOWER

HABS  
WYO,  
1-ROCK CREEK, WY  
1A-7

Location: NW 1/4 of the NE 1/4, Section 31, Township 22 N, Range 75 W. At the junction of Rock Creek and the old Union Pacific Railroad alignment, about 8 miles NE of Rock River, Albany County, Wyoming.

Present Owner: Mrs. Noel Hall, Box 1670, Rock River, Wyoming.

Present Occupant: None.

Present Use: None.

Statement of Significance: The Rock Creek Water Tower is the best preserved of six extant structures of a late 19th-century town that flourished during the early days of the trans-continental railroad. Once a center for the migration and movement of goods into the northern portions of Wyoming and southern Montana, the town of Rock Creek relinquished its plat in 1904; today, it is a ghost town. The water tower is a fitting symbol of this once lively town and a reminder of an active and vigorous chapter in Wyoming's history.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Unknown.
2. Architect: None known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The early title to the property is known according to the following incomplete chain of title. Reference is to the Office of the Clerk, County of Albany, Albany County Courthouse, Laramie, Wyoming.

1899

Deed

April 20, 1899, recorded May 8, 1899, Book Q, page 67, Sherman E. Day, Special Master (Circuit Court of the United States)

to

The Union Pacific Railroad Company

ROCK CREEK WATER TOWER  
HABS No. WYO-55a (Page 2)

- 1902      Warranty Deed (covering most of the platted town)  
January 3, 1902, recorded February 1, 1904, Book  
100, page 600  
The Union Pacific Railroad Company  
to  
William Taylor
- 1904      Relinquishment  
April 18, 1904, recorded April 18, 1904, Book  
101, page 19  
William and Josephine Taylor, owners of all of  
the town of Rock Creek, save lot 9, declare the  
property to be vacated, and that public rights  
are diverted.

All deeds relating to section 31 which were examined during this study excluded the old town site from transference of property. Although there is nothing to indicate that the property ever left the Taylors, there is a mortgage which indicates that the Taylors made a loan to the Halls with the property as security. Today the town of Rock Creek is entirely surrounded by property owned by the Halls (technically known as the Noel Hall Company), and it is assumed that, with the vacancy of the Taylors, the town became the property of the Halls in fact, if not in law.

4. Original plans and construction: There is no evidence, physical or documentary, to indicate that the original structure was substantially different from the structure in its present state. It is a centralized octagonal tower, sloping gradually inward from the ground for the first twelve feet or so, then nearly vertically for the remaining ten feet to the pyramidal roof. Originally there was an elaborate wooden finial at the peak of the roof. Fragmentary remains of a ladder are still attached to the northeast face. On the southeast side there is a float gauge which measured to a depth of eight feet. Its painted numerals stand in relief, the wood beneath the paint having weathered less than the exposed wood on the rest of the gauge. There are various disconnected pipes near the tank which make no connections outside the structure. Hinge marks on the exterior of the door jamb indicate that there was once a door which opened out--the present door has interior hinges and opens in. The internal structure indicates that the tower and tank were built simultaneously.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

The town of Rock Creek was founded in 1867. In 1878 the Union Pacific Railroad reached the town and made it an important junc-

tion between Medicine Bow and Fort Fetterman. The town became a center for numerous freighting and staging operations which supplied vast areas to the north. At no time were there more than twenty families living in the town. Its importance as a commercial and shipping center is apparent from the number and kind of structures which once occupied the site: 5 saloons, 2 hotels, 2 general merchandise stores, a post office, a railroad depot, a stage station, a blacksmith shop, government warehouse, section house, Union Pacific pumping plant, schoolhouse, U. S. Quartermaster's headquarters, several large stockyards and about 15 dwellings. The dwellings were generally built of log, lumber, or up-ended railroad ties.

Rock Creek was the official wagon-supply point for the northern military outposts, including Forts Fetterman, McKinney, Keough, Custer, and the Big Horn and Yellowstone regions. Stage lines ran as far north from there as Junction City, Montana, which was renamed Custer City when the Northern Pacific went through. That trip took a gruelling three days through very rough country. Another line went to Deadwood, South Dakota. The Rock Creek station manager was "Dad" Cluggage, and the last stage out of Rock Creek was driven by C. D. Griffin. Among the notable passengers on the line were "Buffalo Bill" Cody, General Grenville M. Dodge, Bill Nye, and "Calamity Jane," whose trunk was withheld when she could not pay the fare. (The trunk contained some clothes and a picture of "Wild Bill" Hickok, and was last seen in the attic of the pump house at Fort Steele.)

Rock Creek's only lynching occurred in 1882, when a young clerk in Clay's store murdered a customer and was hanged by a gang of cowboys and freighters.

Although the Territory of Wyoming had had women's suffrage from the very beginning, 1869, the ratification of the Wyoming State Constitution in 1890, including the suffrage clause, was reason for a huge celebration at Rock Creek. Mrs. Thuel S. Garrett, an active Wyoming suffragette, and her husband are commemorated in the name of the access road to the town.

There was never a church in town, and services were very seldom held. There was a very comfortable schoolhouse, however, and contemporary descriptions indicate that it was a source of town pride and concern. The school was limited in its offerings however, and anything beyond a basic education required attendance at a private school in Cheyenne.

The construction of the Cheyenne and Northern Railroad in 1887 brought about the decline of Rock Creek. The town plat was

eventually relinquished in 1904. Of the original 30 or more buildings, only six, including the Water Tower, remain. Rock Creek today is a very small ghost town.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Albany County Deed Books, office of the Clerk, Albany County Courthouse, Laramie, Wyoming.

Chappell, Edith Manley, "Rock Creek to Custer Station, 1877-1882," a first-person account in manuscript form, in the research library of the Wyoming State Historical Society, cat. n. WPA 68A.

Rietz, Minnie A., "My Wyoming School Days," 1936, an unpublished first-person article in the research library of the Wyoming State Historical Society, Cheyenne, Wyoming, cat. n. WPA 301.

Rietz, Minnie A., "Old Rock Creek," May 1, 1936, a manuscript in the research library of the Wyoming State Historical Society, Cheyenne, cat. n. WPA 319.

2. Published and secondary sources:

Adams & Bishop, The Pacific Tourist/Illustrated Trans-Continental Guide, 1885, Adams and Bishop, New York.

Croffutt, Croffutt's New Overland Tourist and Pacific Coast Guide, 1882, Overland Publishing Company, Omaha, Denver.

Croffutt, Croffutt's Trans-Continental Tourists Guide, 1869, American News Company, New York.

Prepared by John Hnedak  
Historian  
National Park Service  
Summer 1974

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Water Tower is the best preserved structure in this small Wyoming ghost town which has

been abandoned since 1904. This water tower provided water for the town.

2. Condition of fabric: Fair.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Octagonal, 12' x 12', 1 bay; 1 story.

2. Foundations: Stone.

3. Wall construction, finish and color: Weathered clapboard siding. There is a water gauge on the southeast side with faint numerals still visible under decaying paint.

4. Structural system, framing: Wooden frame.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The only entrance is on the northeast with a wooden frame and a vertical wooden plank door. One plank is missing. The door is larger at its base than at the top.

b. Windows and shutters: One window is on the north facade of the octagon. The two-over-two-light double-hung sash window is set into a wooden frame. No glass is left in the window; a screen has been tacked over the lower window sash.

6. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: Pyramidal with remnants of wooden shingles. Wooden sheathing is exposed on part of the roof; a section of this sheathing is missing.

b. Cornice, eaves: The cornice line has crown molding, and there are boxed eaves. A frieze board with cove moldings is at the underside of the eave.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: One enters through the doorway on the northeast side into an octagonal space. A wooden water tank is above this ground level space. There is no access to the tank from this space. A wooden case, probably used as storage bins, is built on one wall.

2. Stairways: None.
3. Flooring: Loose dirt.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Horizontal wooden planks cover the walls. The ceiling is unfinished and the roof structure and sheathing is exposed.
5. Mechanical equipment: Several truncated pipes which once led to and from the water tank have been disconnected. No other mechanical equipment is in evidence.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The water tower sits amid decaying buildings of a ghost town in a prairie of rolling hills surrounded by ranch land. The tower and town are north-east of a private dirt road which leads to the site.
2. Outbuildings: There are several deteriorating buildings around the water tower. These include a house, barn, two storage houses, a store and fences. With the exception of the house, all the roofs are caving in. The house has no doors or windows; inside, many of the ceilings are falling and many of the floors, missing.

Prepared by John P. White  
Supervisor-Architect  
National Park Service  
August 1974

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in cooperation with the State of Wyoming through the Wyoming Recreation Commission and was financed with funds provided by the Wyoming State Legislature. This project was under the general direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, and was completed during the summer of 1974 at the Historic American Buildings Survey Field Office, Cheyenne, Wyoming. Professor John P. White (Texas Tech University) was the Project Supervisor and John D. Hnedak (Cornell University) was the Project Historian. Student Assistant Architects who prepared the measured drawings were Thomas L. Amis, Jr. (University of Texas, Austin), Stephen O. Fildes (Texas Tech University), John T. Reddick (Yale University), and Paul Wheeler (University of Idaho). Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer, provided the photographic records. This report was edited for HABS in 1977 by Candace Reed.